

## Traders and Poets at the Mrauk U Court

### Commerce and Cultural Links in Seventeenth-Century Arakan

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**M**ARKING THE cultural frontier between South and South-East Asia, Arakan raised a bit of curiosity during the colonial period, but until fairly recently its early modern history did not attract much interest among post-colonial scholars. Looking at the kingdom's great political and cultural epoch stretching from the 1530s up to the 1680s from a *South Asian* perspective, several early scholars based themselves essentially on Persian and Bengali sources and looked at Arakan as a marginal, but troublesome chiefdom mainly living off piracy along the coasts of the Bay of Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

Disregarding the fact that the Arakanese kings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were staunch Buddhists, scholarly discussions were limited to the potential degree of the impact of Islam and the court's Islamization. The Islamic influence coming from India was consciously (or unconsciously) understood as having a positive civilizing impact on the rude and tribal Arakanese. A look at Maurice Collis' famous article of 1925, 'Arakan's Place in the Civilization of the Bay (A Study of Coinage and Foreign Relations)', shows best how colonial historiography handsomely spread such deprecative interpretations of Arakan's Buddhist civilization. Collis' amateurish articles and books did a great deal to exoticize Arakan and mystify subjects of historical concern such as the history of Buddhism or the study of travelogues, but they did not in any way recover Arakan's political, economic or cultural history from the ruins of political and social disruptions that followed the Burmese conquest of 1785 and the ugly beginnings of British



colonization.<sup>2</sup> As for Burmese and British historians of Burma, few took any serious interest in scholarly research on Arakan.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Arakanese writers in their confined circles cherished the memory of their kings as much as oral traditions. Moreover, the limited record of late chronicle writing also allowed them to do so. Their concern was not about historical research and fact finding, but the preservation of a collective memory of ancient Buddhist rulers, an endeavour that contributed to the building of their contemporary Arakanese ethnic identity.

Change was slow to come and it came from an unsuspected quarter. The study of Arakan's history became fashionable as an offshoot of Luso-Indian studies in the context of Bay of Bengal research in the 1990s. Sanjay Subrahmanyam's research offered new insights into the important Portuguese communities in the Chattagrama (present-day Chittagong) area, many of which had also served the interests of the Arakanese kings. Work by Ana Guedes followed in the same track and it not only threw new light on the commercial networks of the Portuguese, but also on the territorial expansion of the Arakanese kingdom and its tremendous naval power in the seventeenth century. To be true, a more fact-bound picture of Arakan, based on Western sources, had already been partly projected with D.G.E. Hall's research on the Dutch presence in Arakan. First published in an article in 1936, it was prominently displayed in his 1955 *History of Southeast Asia*—for many years a standard reference book on South-East Asian history.<sup>4</sup> From the point of view of historiography, Dutch sources on the region are valuable because not only do they balance and supplement indigenous and other Western sources on Arakan itself, but also convey an excellent sense of the dominant economic and political position that Arakan had towards south-east Bengal in the first part of the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> Most recently, Stephan van Galen's doctoral dissertation 'Arakan and Bengal: The Rise and Decline of the Mrauk U kingdom (Burma) from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century AD' (Leiden, 2008), entirely based on yet unpublished Dutch archival documents, marks a tremendous step ahead for Arakanese studies. It fleshes out many earlier suppositions and hypotheses regarding Arakan's so-called golden age in the seventeenth century and brings necessary correctives to studies done since the late 1980s by writers who had based their historical research mainly on an exploration of Burmese and Arakanese sources.

A corollary of the new research on Arakan is that some major aspects of Arakan's cultural, political and economic status in the eastern Indian Ocean have come to look even more surprisingly paradoxical.<sup>6</sup> Two such apparent contradictions will be highlighted and discussed in this essay. Both Mughal and Portuguese sources suggest that the Arakanese rulers in the early seventeenth century were plunderers rather than state builders in

areas that were not royal core-lands. How could, in circumstances where constant warfare against Arakan's neighbours was literally institutionalized by its rulers, economic production, and particularly maritime trade, be a pillar of Arakan's treasury income as contemporary historians assume? In the first part of the essay, Jacques Leider picks up that issue starting with a plain sketch of the political and military record.<sup>7</sup> After looking at Arakan as a local power-broker that dominated maritime connections along the north-eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal, Jacques Leider looks at Arakan's trade within the eastern Indian Ocean commercial network and interprets the coexistence of administrative-cum-economic activities and warfare. The second puzzling question this essay deals with are the circumstances in which some of the most exquisite Bengali poetry could be written by Muslim poets at the court of the Arakanese kings who defined themselves primarily as Buddhist monarchs coming from the same religious and cosmological tradition as Burmese and Siamese kings.<sup>8</sup> Thibaut d'Hubert will tackle this question in the second part, focusing on the complex cultural environment that was a distinguishing feature of the Arakanese court in the seventeenth century.

#### FROM EARLY EXPANSION TO INSTITUTIONAL WARFARE

On the map, Arakan appears as a long coastal strip cut off from Burma's Irrawaddy valley by a steep and jungle infested mountain-chain, the Arakan Yoma. From the point of view of human geography, the demographic heartland of Arakan lies in the north on the upper course of the Kaladan and Lemro river basins where fertile lands favoured human settlement. Ancient walls testify to the existence of Indianized cities in the first millennium while archaeological and iconographic remains point to the coexistence of Buddhist and Brahmanic practitioners. Unfortunately information gets particularly scarce for the period from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries when, in neighbouring Burma, the great Buddhist kingdom of Pagan flourished. There is no clear evidence to indicate that the Pagan kings ever controlled the cities of northern Arakan,<sup>9</sup> but the intellectual and artistic contacts between Pagan and the Bengal of the Pala dynasty render it likely that over time Arakan became more distinctly Buddhist.

When the kingdom of Mrauk U<sup>10</sup> developed a prominence of its own during the fifteenth century, it was no more Pagan but the Bengal Sultanate which was the dominant political force and the cultural beacon in the northern Bay of Bengal. The impact of the prestigious sultanate on the as yet politically insignificant Arakanese court made itself felt by the adoption of similar coins and the use of Islamicized royal titles.<sup>11</sup> Unlike its tiny predecessors in the Lemro valley (the so-called Lemro cities), the

early city-state of Mrauk U was no more a victim of the rivalry of the kings of Ava (Central Burma) and the Mon kings of Pego (Lower Burma), who had constantly tried to extend their influence beyond their core domains. Indeed, it looked as if the threat of neighbourly interference pushed the kings of Mrauk U to bolster their resources and defence and extend their own supremacy beyond the Kaladan and Lemro river plains. In the middle of the fifteenth century, Arakanese power was pushed towards the north-east where the kings were taking control of the coastal lands south of Chattagrama (Ramu) as well as southwards where Arakanese authority was imposed over the island of Ramree (Yanbye) and in Sandoway (Thandwe). When the first wave of Arakanese territorial expansion peaked in the 1530s under King Man Pa with raids that took the Arakanese fleets up to the thriving port-city of Chattagrama,<sup>12</sup> the king's motives may well have been to pillage the wealthy port but above all to confront the Chakma, whose raids are presented by the Arakanese annals as a recurrent challenge between the late thirteenth and the late sixteenth centuries.<sup>13</sup>

If external threats were, as we would suggest, one of the main propulsive causes of Arakanese expansion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we can explain why the unsuccessful Burmese invasions of 1545–6 (under King Tabinshwethi) and 1580–1 (under King Bayinnaung) did not lead to a flagging but a strengthened Arakanese military power. Not once, but twice, did the Arakanese resist the most powerful military force of sixteenth century South-East Asia. The chronicles mention the impressive fortifications of Mrauk U and explain how the Arakanese flooded the surroundings of the city to fend off the assailants. Surprisingly, the sources tell us generally little about the key instrument of Arakanese warfare, fleets of hundreds and later thousands of boats that were swiftly rowed along the waterways. Due to their proximity to Bengal's economic centre and to early contacts with the Portuguese, one would imagine that the Arakanese took advantage of these opportunities to assimilate technical progress in weaponry. Infact, just a few years after the first Portuguese sailors arrived in Chattagrama (1516), the Arakanese king sent them an invitation for trading. Yet very little is known about Luso-Arakanese relations before the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

#### ARAKAN'S WARRIOR KINGS

In the sixteenth century, Chattagrama was the maritime gate to Bengal's trade. Its peripheral situation favoured its political and cultural autonomy but also made it more easily a potential prey for envious neighbours. The Mughal conquest of West and Central Bengal in 1576 left East Bengal for decades in the hands of local Muslim or Hindu lords, the so-called *Baro*

*Bhuiyas*. The new political circumstances opened up a period of unrivalled opportunities for the Arakanese and the local Portuguese communities in south-east Bengal as they took advantage of the absence of any strong central power.<sup>15</sup> After 1589 the Arakanese king Man Phalaung (1571–93) took complete control over Chattagrama.<sup>16</sup> The extension of Arakanese hegemony did not necessarily take place by sheer force as no Arakanese (nor any other) sources report a *single* momentary military conquest of the port-city. Numismatic evidence would suggest that at first local Muslim governors came under Arakanese authority before direct rule was exerted by Arakanese princes. For the next eighty years, the port of Chattagrama with its hinterland was an invaluable resource with its agricultural production and export goods. Thus was Chattagrama able to maintain its position in the Bay of Bengal trade network. Together with the final subjection of the Chakma king and the elimination of the king of Tripura as a serious rival, the establishment of Man Phalaung's effective rule over Chattagrama marked a decisive step in Arakan's rise to regional power status.

After the defeat of Mughal general Shahbaz Khan in 1584 by the local lord of Bengal Isa Khan, Emperor Akbar sent Raja Man Singh as the new governor to Bengal (1594–1606). He defeated powerful local zamindars and in 1602 moved the Mughal headquarters eastwards to Dhaka, bringing Mughal power closer to the Arakanese frontier. To this move the Arakanese king Man Rajagri (1593–1612), with support from Kedar Rai (a local zamindar), reacted immediately by a show of his naval power when he attacked Sonargaon and Dhaka.<sup>17</sup> This strategy of preventive attacks and rapid naval dissuasion became a characteristic mark of Arakanese warfare over the next decades. Simultaneously, closer to their own borders, the Arakanese faced some of the ambitious Portuguese leaders who were at the head of various Luso-Asian communities and whose members not only marketed their mercenary forces to rival lords, but also fought amongst each other. Numerous indeed were the Portuguese who had escaped the restrictive regime of Goa's maritime control and settled in the north-eastern Bay of Bengal.<sup>18</sup>

In 1597/8, Man Rajagri joined the lord of Taungu in the siege of Pegu, the capital of an already severely weakened Burmese kingdom. After the fall of the city (1599), Lower Burma fell prey to rival lords. The Arakanese king installed Felipe de Brito, one of his Portuguese captains, as the governor of Syriam, Lower Burma's main port of trade. But just a few years later, de Brito made himself independent and even obtained the official support of Goa. Several attempts of the Arakanese to re-establish their sovereign power in Syriam failed until a restored Burmese kingship swept away de Brito's self-made state. On his north-east frontier, it took Man Rajagri three years (1602–5) to dislodge Manuel de Mattos and Domingo Carvalho from

the island of Sandwip, a key area of sugar and cotton production. During the first years of his reign, King Man Khamaung (1612–22) was severely hampered in his campaigns to conquer the lower reaches of the Bengal delta (notably Bhalwa), because of the repeated betrayals of Sebastiao Tibao, another Portuguese warlord. The tales of the successful enterprises of men like de Brito led men at Goa to look at south-east Bengal and Arakan as zones of potential territorial conquests. In 1615 a Portuguese armada sent from Goa went up the Kaladan to conquer Mrauk U, but failed dismally. After the defeat, Luso-Arakanese relations turned progressively to the lasting advantage of the Arakanese. The Dutch presence made itself felt in the region and Goa was keen on improving relations with the Arakanese court.<sup>19</sup> The Luso-Asian communities remained an autonomous and sometimes unpredictable group in the vicinity of Chattagrama, but they became nonetheless essentially a domesticated mercenary force. As the renascent Burmese kingdom focused its attention on strengthening its control over its Burman core lands and the eastern Shan country, Arakanese kings had their hands free to face the imminent pressure of Mughal power on their western frontier. After Qasim Khan's failed conquest of Chattagrama in 1617,<sup>20</sup> Man Khamaung doubled his attacks against Dhaka and Bhalwa between 1618 and 1621, effectively extending Arakanese overlordship in south-east Bengal.<sup>21</sup> Taking into account the Arakanese naval superiority, the next governor of Bengal, Ibrahim Khan, tried to attack Chattagrama in 1621 by choosing to march through the land route. But the Mughal troops with their hundreds of elephants and their cavalry got stuck in the jungles north of Chattagrama and had to retreat. During the course of Shah Jahan's rebellion, Mughal rule over south-east Bengal became virtually extinct.

Notwithstanding that the young King Sirisudhammarājā (1622–38), pursuing the policy of his predecessors, deported 30,000 Bengalis into slavery in 1623, Shah Jahan craved for local support and gave an extremely kind reception to the Arakanese ambassadors at Dhaka in May 1624. But the unstable political situation in Bengal literally invited the Arakanese to push back Mughal administrators and extend their own rule. Bhalwa was raided in 1624, Sripur conquered in 1625 and in early 1626 Dhaka was burned to the ground.<sup>22</sup> Father Manrique, an Augustinian monk who lived in Arakan in the early 1630s, writes that from 1622 to 1629 it was impossible to safely cross the Bay because of the risk of running into one of these Arakanese fleets who were not challenged by any Mughal resistance.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, in the late 1630s, the Mughals had to move their capital from Dhaka to Rajmahal where they were safe from Arakanese naval attacks.

When in 1637, Islam Khan Mashhadi, the governor of Bengal, sent an embassy to Mrauk U to implore Sirisudhammarājā to discontinue his systematic depredation of Bengal, the Arakanese king remained unfazed

and challenged the Mughal for another battle.<sup>24</sup> Warfare came to be institutionalized as it became a regular exercise of supremacy built on a superior naval force. The naval demonstrations were a method of enforcing Arakanese rule and hegemony. As their superiority was uncontested along the rivers and coasts of Bengal, the Arakanese could pursue an equally threatening policy towards the Burmese. After countering a Burmese attack into Arakan in 1616, the initiative passed into Arakanese hands and their fleets attacked and looted Pegu and Syriam in 1626 and 1630. When Sirisudhammarājā died in 1638 under uncertain circumstances (and shortly after him, his young son), the kingdom was, in territorial extent, at its peak. The succession and the advent of a new dynasty marked the outcome of an inner crisis that not only involved competing personal ambitions, but probably also reflected a debate on the course of economic policy.

#### DYNASTIC CHANGE AND INTERNAL CONFRONTATIONS

The new king Narapati (1638–45) had been a powerful figure during Sirisudhammarājā's reign; Van Galen identifies him with the 'peace faction' in terms of economic policy. The dynastic transition itself proved extremely violent. After butchering its opponents, the new court struggled to keep its power and master rebellions at the periphery. Narapati's first military campaign was not directed at the Mughals, but sent off to fight a relative of the former king who had assembled troops in south-east Bengal. The dominant faction at the new court, undoubtedly including the king himself, wanted to weaken the outlying economic powerhouse in Chattagrama that could serve as a basis for rebels and reinforce, as a corollary, the economic and political centre in Mrauk U. It is certainly in line with this approach that the project of a massive deportation of rural craftsmen from Chattagrama should be interpreted.<sup>25</sup> But the embroilment of the leading social classes in political dissensions and the discontinuing of outbound warfare that had been the mark of the reigns of the warrior kings favoured further rebellions at the periphery. Under the little-known reign of Satodhammarājā (1645–52), several expeditions were indeed despatched to successfully restore central power *inside* the kingdom. From detailed Dutch accounts, we learn that, like in the preceding reign, the king and his court officials discussed if they would either attack the Mughals in Sripur or the Arakanese governor in Sandwip who had rebelled!<sup>26</sup> King Candasudhammarājā (1652–84) made considerable efforts to revive foreign trade making, once more, overtures towards the VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, the Dutch East India Company). But he also had to struggle to see that slave traders returned to the Chattagrama market. As the court was struggling with inner political dissensions, it increasingly

lost its check over the Luso-Asian captains who were officially running the slave trade with royal permission.

Shah Shuja's campaign against Tripura in 1656 came close to Arakan's borders and was perceived as an immediate threat which led to frantic defensive efforts in Chattagrama. The panic that this Mughal campaign provoked at the capital demonstrated that with the abandonment of the earlier bellicose policy, Narapati and his successors had also tolerated or favoured (as we may assume) a weakened defence of outlying Chattagrama. The kings of this second Mrauk U dynasty were above all lords of their golden palace (*shwe-nan*), living in the midst of a multi-cultural and resplendent court, and enjoying the wealth and prosperity of a kingdom that had been built by the warrior kings at the price of constant warfare. But this relative security could only last as long as the Arakanese could continue to maintain the frightening reputation of their fleets. The much-debated death of Shah Shuja in Arakan after his unhappy flight from Bengal in 1660 and the disgraceful treatment of the Mughal ambassadors by the Arakanese court did not present a *causus belli per se*, but they did revive Mughal endeavours to put an end to such presumed arrogance. Sensing the imminent danger, the Arakanese did not fail to once more make a pre-emptive strike. Leading a massive attack against Dhaka in 1664 they were able to demonstrate that if challenged, they could still muster an impressive fleet. But by now the Mughal camp had engaged itself in preparations on a new scale taking into account lessons learnt in earlier decades. In actuality, Shaista Khan's master stroke was to buy off the king's Portuguese mercenaries.<sup>27</sup> When Chattagrama finally fell into the hands of the Mughals in 1666, the political and economic decline of the Arakanese kingdom became inevitable.

#### TRADE COMMODITIES AND THE INDIAN OCEAN MARKET

Any narrative of the political and military record of Arakan's rise and coastal expansion is fraught with descriptions of Mughal-Arakanese warfare, the making and unmaking of alliances, destructive naval attacks, plunder and looting and deportations on a large scale. These facts suggest that the seventeenth century Arakanese kingdom thrived best in conditions of constant warfare. A natural question for a historian to ask would be: how did the *pax aracanensis* in south-east Bengal tie with the need to rule the land and to extract a durable income for a court that had to uphold an administrative and military apparatus.

Let us be aware that simply by asking such a question a historian moves far beyond what most (but fortunately not all!) sources are ready to reveal at first sight. Therefore, before we go on to discuss the issue of trade, we may now focus on the nature of some of our historical sources and peek

into the historian's toolbox. The political interpretation of Arakan's military history and the kingdom's remarkable expansion has been hampered by the difficulty to aptly interpret some of the terminology of the Arakanese and Mughal primary sources. The Arakanese chronicles are annals rather than descriptive accounts of the kingdom's history. They developed from lists where dates, titles and events of particular significance were compiled; their writers had a major interest in the number of queens and children, pious works and pilgrimages and more specifically in astrology and the interpretation of omens and predictions. The aim of the writers was neither to document the prowess of heroic leaders nor to describe successful policies or administrative measures, but instead to set the reigns within a Buddhist cosmological order determined by moral rightfulness. The Mughals despised the Arakanese and their kings as barbarians who in the words of Jahangir had 'no proper religion' and who 'eat everything there is either on land or in the sea and nothing is forbidden by their religion.' This general attitude led contemporary Mughal writers such as Mirza Nathan or Shihabuddin Talish to describe Arakanese military campaigns as 'piracy' in the same disparaging manner as the Arakanese sources would talk about the Burmese or the Mughals as 'insurgents'. As stated in the introduction to the essay, some historians too adopted this stance in their accounts.

If the Arakanese rule in south-east Bengal had been nothing more than slave raiding and the depletion of Bengal's countryside, what kind of lasting profit would the Arakanese have extracted from their conquests? An answer to such a question can only be broached when a historian refrains from paraphrasing the sources used and accepts that royal fleets with hundreds, and occasionally thousands, of ships cannot be adequately described as 'pirates' and imperial armies cannot conveniently be depicted as 'rebels'.

Arakanese expansionism was not primarily territorialist, but also focused on controlling and milking a revenue-generating network of ports, cities and villages to maintain a splendid court, huge garrisons, large fortresses and enormous fleets on standby. After an early expansive phase, warfare became an instrument to uphold strategic advantages and increase material profit. The objective was not to invest in a maximum, but a minimum, of violence to obtain a maximum return in terms of regular income. Confronted with a vastly superior neighbour such as Bengal, the Arakanese kingdom was *per se* in a defensive position from the late sixteenth century onwards. In simple terms, once the Arakanese had taken control of Chattagrama and its productive hinterland, they had to do everything they could to keep the Mughals away from that honeypot, i.e. Chattagrama's economy. Shifting people away from the frontier and proclaiming one's presence by constant aggression formed the core of an unformulated doctrine of military dissuasion which did not prevent trade, but actually reconciled Arakan's economic stakes with its political interests.

In the Bay, Arakan's maritime trade linked the kingdom to Bengal which provided opium, cloth and salt, and to the Coromandel Coast from where mainly cloth, iron and tobacco were imported. Kauris, used as currency in Arakan, were brought from the Maldives. Trade connections existed also with Gujarat to which Arakan exported elephants as well as with Aceh and Malaka which provided Arakan with tin, lead, sulphur and pepper. Arakan's main export was rice. Inland trade with Burma was hampered by the barrier of the mountain range and was focused on the export of betel nuts and the re-exportation of rubies and other precious stones. The long distance trade was bound to Chattagrama while the river port of Mrauk U came only a distant second.

Though we have a clearer perception of the involvement of Portuguese and Dutch traders in the seventeenth century trade, there is no doubt that it was Muslim traders coming mainly from India who marked a continuous presence in Arakan's maritime trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They were competing with Portuguese traders at the court of Man Rajagri, when the stakes were high, to gain a foothold in Lower Burma's trade after Pegu fell in 1599. Indian traders continued to visit Arakan long after Western traders had left for good. The Arakanese kings themselves seem to have had a keen interest in trade although details are not available. At the zenith of Mrauk U's power in the 1630s, Dutch sources document King Sirisudhammarājā's creation of a rice monopoly, mention the despatch of royal trading ships to sell Arakanese elephants in south India and in particular Queen Nat-shin-may's involvement in maritime trade.<sup>28</sup> Scholars working on Arakanese history have commonly insisted on the singular importance of trade for Arakan's treasury as such. As Van Galen recently put it: 'when viewed in terms of the commerce in the Bay of Bengal as a whole, Arakanese trade always was a rather limited affair'. This conclusion recalls Om Prakash's statement twenty years ago, where he said, 'in the eastward trade from Bengal, the trade with Arakan-Pegu ... was comparatively insignificant'. But he also said that we actually knew very little about this trade.<sup>29</sup>

#### CONNECTION BETWEEN TRADE AND WARFARE

The most prominent export items of seventeenth-century Arakan, i.e. rice and slaves, were directly linked to the kingdom's political expansion and the aggressive defence of its economic interests in Bengal. Rice production was indeed the single most important sector of Arakan's early modern economy. It was an important item produced in Arakan itself and in those parts of south-east Bengal ruled by the Arakanese where it took place in stable conditions not colliding with the state of affairs along the frontier. The fertile ground, advantageous climate and extensive use of forced

labour ensured a voluminous and low-cost production that could be sold at an extremely competitive price. The Dutch VOC had a great need both for rice and slaves: slaves to till the plantations in Java and rice to feed them. The Arakanese who directly sent trade embassies to Batavia were aware of these needs and could adjust their trade policies consequently. The kings up to the reign of Candasudhammarājā were keen to see the VOC maintain a trading post in Mrauk U.

Over time, the prominence of the trade in human labour reinforced the branding of the Arakanese rulers as plunderers rather than administrators. To demonstrate that there was no contradiction between the depredatory aspects of warfare and the long-term political and economic interests, we have to put the ‘slave trade’ in a historical perspective. In the sixteenth century, the expansionist policy of the Arakanese kings started from a narrow demographic basis. It is a well known fact in historical studies that the lack of human labour to muster sufficient military forces was a perennial problem for South-East Asian rulers. Arakanese rulers used their cutting-edge naval superiority to deport people in massive numbers from the areas that they invaded. This policy may have been started under Man Pa’s reign (1530–53) already, but it was definitely practised on a grand scale after the fall of Pegu (1599) when thousands of Mon were shifted with their families to Arakan. They became ‘royal slaves’ in a technical sense. They were settled in villages along the Kaladan and they themselves and their descendants came to form an elite troop among Arakan’s royal guards. The Hindu and Muslim Bengalis that were deported by the Arakanese were settled as royal workers (*lamaing*) in the rice growing plains of the Kaladan and the Lemro Rivers.<sup>30</sup> It was this use of bonded agricultural labour that enabled the kings to employ a large part of Arakan’s male population to man the fleets and the garrisons of the fortresses in Chattagrama and other places in south-east Bengal. As much as possible, the kings kept a tight control over the human labour market, reserving for themselves the exclusive right of the labour of qualified and notably educated people.

While in the early decades of Arakan’s expansion Arakanese royal fleets had handled the deportation of people themselves, since the 1620s the raids of coastal lands and deportations were entrusted to Portuguese captains who headed Luso-Asian crews.<sup>31</sup> The deportees that the king did not claim for the state could be sold on the market, either in western Bengal or in Orissa or in Chattagrama to the Dutch. It is true that the profit for the kings depended on their control of the Luso-Asian communities which was not always guaranteed as the captains tried to get a greater share of the profit by reselling on the high seas.

In conclusion we see that the displacement-cum-exploitation of human labour had various aspects that according to the context we would describe as ‘slave trade’ or ‘depopulation/resettlement’. During the second Mrauk

U dynasty, the Luso-Asian captains regained their earlier autonomy and slave raiding continued until the late eighteenth century in roughly similar conditions with the king as a distant and silent shareholder.

The connection between political practice and economic interests lay in the long-term economic usefulness of initially aggressive warfare and later on, and rather more often, aggressive posturing, or what we call today psychological warfare.<sup>32</sup> The political bonus of the systematic depopulation or constant slave raiding along the frontier between the Arakanese and the Mughal territories resulted in the creation of a buffer zone that was ultimately part of the strategic defence of Chattagrama and the rest of the kingdom.<sup>33</sup> The depopulation was not the collateral fall-out of conquest, it was, in economic terms, an investment in future revenue, and in political terms an instrument to create a stable rule at the periphery and to strengthen the power at the centre. This policy was successful until 1666. In a way, considering that the Mughal conquest of Chattagrama was only a half-finished job, one may even consider that Arakan's defence strategy was successful beyond that date because this annoyingly resilient kingdom and its terrifying reputation survived well into the eighteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

Dutch VOC sources suggest that Arakan in the seventeenth century had an efficient fiscal administration. Western travel accounts, like for example those of Father Manrique or Wouter Schouten, contain references to the tight checking of public affairs. It is probably due to the long political and economic decline of Arakan in the eighteenth century that so few indigenous sources have survived to confirm these bits of information on the royal administration and the bureaucracy. Opposing the earlier insistence on trade revenues as the pillar of Mrauk U's wealth and contradicting the conventional interpretation of Mughal rule in Bengal, Van Galen has underscored the importance of land revenue. Based on Shihabuddin Talish's *Fatiyyah-i-Ibriyyah*, he concludes that 'the Arakanese were able to systematically levy taxes . . . from their Bengal domains from the middle of the 1620s'.<sup>35</sup> His conclusion is an important corrective to our generally limited view of the early modern Arakanese kingdom that has led to Eaton's characterization of Arakan as a niche kingdom. Together with the rich picture of the functioning of the court that the Dutch sources allow us, the perception of Arakan as an astute manager of both land and trade resources rehabilitates its reputation from having mainly been a predator state. Contemporary comparisons of Mrauk U with Lisbon or Amsterdam may sound hollow to our modern ears unless we admit that the kingdom in the middle of the seventeenth century boasted considerable administrative and social complexity. The cultural richness of these times is nowhere as well suggested as by a study of the capital's literary circles that provide a look at Arakan's well-educated social elite.

## BENGALI LITERATURE IN ARAKAN

The Bengali literature composed between the reigns of Sirisudhammarājā (1622–38) and Candasudhammarājā (1652–84) in the cosmopolitan court milieu of Mrauk U is a fascinating window on the cultural history of the Mrauk U kingdom during the seventeenth century.<sup>36</sup> The period of the kings of the golden palace offers all the conditions favourable to the development of high culture: a fairly stable political situation, wealth, and strong regional and supra-regional connections that allowed the circulation of men and ideas.<sup>37</sup> Besides the splendid architectural remains of Mrauk U, the description of banquets and celebrations that come down to us show the magnificence and the pomp displayed by the Arakanese kings.<sup>38</sup> But, with the exception of the chronicles, no extant literary corpus produced at the court of the Arakanese kings has come to light until today.

It is Bengali literature that provides the most comprehensive picture of the literary culture as conceived and practised by the members of the royal court. This does not mean that literature in languages other than Bengali was not read and produced in Mrauk U. Besides Bengali, we do find evidence of literary activities in Arakanese, Pali, Sanskrit, Hindavi, Persian and Arabic, though these are not documented to the same extent. For instance, Arakanese literature is mainly represented by poems and chronicles,<sup>39</sup> Pali was studied as the sacred language of Buddhism,<sup>40</sup> Sanskrit scholarship was practiced by brahmans, Bengali Muslims and Buddhist monks and, besides its ritual use, was considered as a technical and scientific language (astrology, poetics, etc.).<sup>41</sup> As for Hindavi, Persian and Arabic, their use is explicitly referred to in the Bengali texts. Some letters and one inscription also testify to the use of Persian in administrative and diplomatic affairs.<sup>42</sup> One cause of the unequal transmission of those texts lay in the major political changes that occurred during the subsequent periods. The progressive decay of the kingdom led to the disappearance of the institutions and the milieus that allowed for the existence of such literary practices.

Eventually some of the most exquisite literary texts composed in Bengali found their way down to modern times, though with some alterations due to the shift from the social environment of their composition to the place where they were preserved. The Bengali texts of Mrauk U were a product of courtly culture, but were actually transmitted in the rural areas of Chattagrama. It is thanks to the perennial status of Bengali as a trans-regional culture language that we have inherited these superb literary documents.

During the late sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth centuries, Bengali texts were composed both in rural areas and in the capital city. We can broadly say that a ‘rural literature’ was produced in the Chattagrama

area, and a more ‘urban literature’—with all the features of sophistication this term may suggest—was composed in Mrauk U. The texts of the Muslim authors of Chattagrama addressed a rural audience. Formally, their poems were *panchalis*, the traditional form of Bengali narrative literature.<sup>43</sup> These were performed by a *gayena* (singer) or a *kathaka* (story teller) and sometimes accompanied by musicians. The themes treated by the authors were mainly religious, that is to say that their aim was to openly teach the fundamentals of Islam to the recently converted population of the region. Hence, voluminous narrative texts such as Saiyid Sultan’s *Nabīvarṇśā* (The line of the prophets) were intended to familiarize the audience with the lives of the prophets of Islam, hence providing an alternative narrative religious corpus to that of the Hindu epics (the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*), or the story of Krṣṇa. Besides, authors from Chattagrama composed treatises mixing the exposition of elementary Muslim praxis and Sufi spirituality combined with Yogic practices.<sup>44</sup> In both cases—narrative literature or treatises—the authors claim that their sources were Arabic and more frequently Persian texts, but these models are usually not precisely mentioned. Very few mentions are made of the Arakanese political power that could reveal the historical context of their composition.<sup>45</sup>

We will now explore the literary circles of Mrauk U. Two Bengali authors testify to the literary life in the Arakanese capital during the seventeenth century: Daulat Kājī and Ālāol. Nothing is known of the life of Daulat Kājī who, unlike Ālāol, did not include his personal itinerary in his text.<sup>46</sup> In several prologues of his poems Ālāol recounts the main events of his life in a few verses.<sup>47</sup> Originally from Fathabad, Ālāol was the son of the ‘minister’ of the Afghan ruler Majlis Quṭb. One day, as he was travelling by boat with his father, they were attacked by a Portuguese-led flotilla (Ben. *hārmāda*) from Arakan which was raiding the area to bring back slaves. The father died in the skirmish and the son was brought to Mrauk U. There he became a royal horseman and, later, the Muslims living in Mrauk U observed that he was a ‘seeker of knowledge’ (Per. *tālib-i ‘ilm*)—an important term in the Indo-Persian networks of poets and scholars of the time. They brought Ālāol to a Muslim dignitary Māgana Thākura who took great care of him. During an assembly where Muhammad Jāyasi’s Awadhi<sup>48</sup> poem *Padmāvati* had been read, Māgana Thākura asked Ālāol to translate it into the ‘regional language’ (*desibhāṣā*), that is to say Bengali, the same way as Daulat Kājī did a few decades before on the order of Āsraph Khān, the chief of the army (*lashkar wazīr*) of Mrauk U. Thereafter Ālāol had several patrons for whom he wrote five more poems. In 1660 the flight of Prince Shuja’ to Arakan heralded a political crisis. At one point the prince’s guards tried to burn down the palace, while the Muslims of Mrauk U were suspected of siding with the Mughals. Ālāol himself spent 50 days in prison and lost all his

belongings. After 1660 he translated only texts from Persian in which he emphasized his Muslim identity. His last poem is the *Sikāndarnāmā* (The Book of Alexander), composed around 1671—a translation of the Persian poet Nizami's *Sharafnāma* (AD 1194).

#### LOCATING BENGALI LITERATURE IN THE ARAKANESE COURT MILIEU

Patronage was central to establish and publicize one's rank and place in society. Daulat Kājī and Ālāol were patronized by Muslims who had made a career in the Arakanese administration or the royal army.<sup>49</sup> Ālāol presented the composition of a poem as the perennial medium to valorize a patron's accomplishments. The patronage of poets thus took place beside other kinds of patronage such as the construction of religious buildings or the excavation of tanks.<sup>50</sup> The patrons themselves were recognizably close to the Arakanese court. In the prologues, a eulogy of the king always preceded and introduced that of the patron.<sup>51</sup> This proximity and the emphasis on the close relationship between the Bengali Muslim courtier and the Arakanese king led some historians of Bengali literature to talk about literary patronage by the Arakanese kings themselves<sup>52</sup>—indicating that the rhetorical strategy of the poets was efficient, and thanks to the arrangement of their prologues, their poems were received by the readers as products of the royal court. From what we read in these prologues, these were not commissioned or performed at the royal court of Mrauk U, but during assemblies (*sabhā*) held at the patron's place. The latter observation was made by Ahmad Sharif who even argued that Daulat Kājī and Ālāol should not be considered as 'Arakanese poets', but as 'exiled Bengali poets'.<sup>53</sup> This remark could make sense in the perspective of the formation of the modern Bangladeshi cultural identity, but it holds less relevance in seventeenth-century Arakan. To cut this discussion short, the most accurate way to look at this issue is to take into account the close relation to the local power of the Bengali Muslims depicted in those texts, as well as their relative distinctiveness from the royal court. This intermediate position seems to match with the actual function of the Bengali Muslim dignitaries as regional intermediaries between the local power and the supra-regional networks.

The Bengali Muslim dignitaries who commissioned the poems are presented as liberal toward strangers residing in Mrauk U and fluent in several languages such as Arakanese, Gujarati, Hindustani, Arabic and Persian.<sup>54</sup> In the cosmopolitan environment of Mrauk U, the Bengali Muslims who were conversant in Arakanese, the local language, Bengali, the trans-regional lingua franca and Persian, the truly international tongue, played the role of an interface between the local power and the outside

world. In this, they were in a way comparable to other regional Muslim elites in other ports of South and South-East Asia.<sup>55</sup> Besides, the role of the Bengali Muslims as cultural intermediaries in Arakan is evident in the fact that the great majority of the texts they commissioned were translations and adaptations from Awadhi—a form of medieval Hindi—and Persian.<sup>56</sup> Translation was a way to assimilate a whole set of values regarding ethics and aesthetics that were common to both the Persianized Muslim elites of northern India and the ports of the Bay of Bengal.<sup>57</sup>

This brings us to the theme of multilingualism in the literary culture of the Bengali Muslims of Arakan and the relevance of specific languages at various levels of interaction. The composite nature of Bengali literature composed in Mrauk U lies in the treatment of Indo-Persian and Persian themes in Bengali with a constant reference to Sanskrit literary culture and aesthetics. It reflects the role of intermediary assumed by Bengali Muslims in Arakan. The languages used in the composition of a poem bear a specific relevance as regards the interactions of Bengali Muslims with the local cultural arena on the one hand, and the regional and supra-regional ones on the other hand. Hence Sanskrit, Bengali and Persian—the main culture languages that contributed to the shaping of this literary corpus—corresponded to different kinds of interactions specific to the Arakanese context. Sanskrit scholarship provided an epistemological framework shared by several intellectual elites at the local level, Bengali was the regional culture language used in other courts of north-eastern South Asia<sup>58</sup> and Persian was the supra-regional culture language which was the key to the integration of Arakan into the commercial and diplomatic networks of the Bay of Bengal. This multilayered set of cultural references characterizes the Bengali literature of Arakan. It also helps to understand how this literature, without being strictly speaking a product of the Arakanese court, nonetheless illustrates the complex cultural environment of the court milieu of Arakan.

In this multicultural environment, the use of a language was not immediately identified as a religious marker. In order to understand how religion was conceived in the relationships between Bengali Muslim dignitaries and the Arakanese ruling class, we have to examine the discourse elaborated by Ālāol on the subject. The eulogies of the Arakanese kings provide interesting insights into the perception of the king's policy by Bengali Muslims as well as the relative importance of the religious element in the administration of the kingdom. The religious dimension is not presented as a matter of contention between the Buddhist ruler and his Muslim courtier, at least not until the crisis linked to the arrival of Shah Shuja' in Mrauk U. One of the most detailed eulogies of the king is found in Ālāol's *Sayphulmuluk o Badiujjāmāla* composed in 1659 that testifies to

the respect and deference of the Bengali Muslim dignitaries towards their Buddhist king. The clearest expression of this fact lies in the comparison of Candasudhammarājā with the Hindu royal figures Yudhiṣṭhira and Vikramāditya, the Buddha and the pre-Islamic Sassanian king Anushirwan (531–79), the embodiment of worldly justice in the Arabic and Persian mirror for princes genre.<sup>59</sup> Ālāol also acclimatized the Salomonic symbol of social harmony, of the lion and the lamb drinking the same water; in the Bengali text the tiger and the lamb are drinking at the same *ghat*.<sup>60</sup> As a general matter, Ālāol seems to consider that political legitimacy resides in the king's ability to maintain justice in order to favour the prosperity of the kingdom and its subjects.<sup>61</sup> The stress on commerce and the frequent visits at the court of foreign representatives also reminds us that Bengali Muslims were then among the first beneficiaries of Arakan in the maritime trade network of the region. It is thus understandable that Ālāol, exalting the grandees of this community, adopted such a secular point of view about politics and governance. But, after the crisis of 1660 caused by Shah Shuja's arrival in Mrauk U, Bengali Muslims were suspected to be on the Mughal side. A clear distinction was made between the Buddhist Arakanese power and the non-Arakanese Muslims. Therefore, the assimilation of religious identities with political factions seems to have become more important during the years that followed. This phenomenon appears in Ālāol's texts through the exclusive choice of Persian models pertaining to a broader Islamic culture. In 1662 the Bengali poet engaged in the translation of a treatise on Muslim morals and practices and,<sup>62</sup> nine years later, in the translation of the story of Alexander who was presented as a prophet who spread Islam in the countries he conquered.<sup>63</sup> But this only evinces a tendency towards the self-affirmation of the Bengali Muslims of Mrauk U. In these later texts, the king is still praised and the prestige of the patrons continues to ensue from the glory of the sovereign and the prosperity of the Arakanese kingdom.<sup>64</sup>

#### TRANSLATION OF ĀLĀOL'S EULOGY OF CANDASUDHAMMARĀJĀ

To conclude, we present a translation of one of the eulogies of Candasudhammarājā composed by Ālāol.<sup>65</sup> The eulogy combines conventional motifs of panegyric poetry with observations more closely related to the Arakanese context. The elements the Bengali poet highlights when praising the king and his kingdom illustrate various aspects of the economic and political history of the kingdom before the turning point of the 1660s. Ālāol sketches the economic foundations of Arakan. Trade and agriculture are mentioned first and are said to underpin the king's power that enables him to ensure justice and stability for his subjects. It is worth noting that Ālāol

emphasizes the inclusion of the Arakanese capital and the king's court in a network of trade and diplomatic activities. He refers to messengers coming by boat and their role in establishing the king's glory in distant countries at the benefit of the latter's treasury. Regarding warfare, the poet does not fail to mention the dissuasive power of the Arakanese flotilla whose mere sight was said to put the enemy to flight. These few verses testify to the fact that Bengali Muslims were aware of the institutionalization of trade and warfare at a time when they themselves occupied a key position as regional intermediaries.

1. The city called Rosāṅga<sup>66</sup> is a matchless place on earth, constantly full of grains and fishes.<sup>67</sup>
2. Free from pain and sorrow, there reside merchants living on trade whose behaviour is liberal.
3. By the power of the good fortune of the subjects and as a result of the labour of the sorrowful ones to make the earth fruitful.
4. The noble king Candrasudharma<sup>68</sup> casts away all sins and fears in order to manifest the sun of meritorious deeds.
5. His body glows like the moon, and the sun is deprived of its light, his sight made Kāma loose his body.<sup>69</sup>
6. The Law of Truth down on earth (*satyadharma avatāra*), he is unique, rightful like Anushirwan.<sup>70</sup>
7. The water of his alms quelled the fire of grief; he spends day and night in delightful games.
8. Revering the sword of justice, the lamb and the tiger meet [peacefully] and drink water together at the [same] ghat.<sup>71</sup>
9. No trace of the malevolent and wicked men's vice anymore; the honest conduct of the king destroys all kind of pains.
10. Gems and pearls by hundreds of thousands are inlaid into the stone, [but] by fear of the king the thief does not steal them.
11. He put an end to the rules of the kings who misbehaved in the past.
12. He satisfied those who were well born and did not waste any labour; he cherishes the world like his own son.
13. Those who were scared by previous kings and [escaped] in other countries experiencing pleasure and pain,
14. When they heard about the greatness of the king, [they] came back and forgot the grief caused by the loss of their position.<sup>72</sup>
15. All this greatness and glory conquered the eight directions and from various countries messengers.<sup>73</sup>
16. Gathered hundreds of vessels and a multitude of riches and clothes to be offered to the king.

17. When the jewel among the kings joyfully hears that a stranger is here, he is always affectionate and sympathetic.
18. The room of the bejewelled throne is crowded, like Indra's paradise,<sup>74</sup> and Candrasudharma presides in a kingly manner.
19. The noble counsellors wear various garments, divine clothes full of fragrances.
20. Everyone seats happily at his due place; [the king] is like Indra surrounded by the Gandharvas.
21. All the messengers wear many beautiful clothes, musk, aloes and sandal.
22. To the king's feet, they offer garments from different countries and many precious products.
23. When he meets with strangers, he shows deep respect and offers them various presents.
24. He satisfies them by sending elephants, horses, jewels and money, many clothes and garments.
25. Satisfied, the messengers return to their homeland and abundantly sing the qualities of this virtuous [king].
26. When [people abroad] hear such unmatchable grandeur, boats gather again and again; endlessly they come and go.
27. Hindus call him Yudhiṣṭhira, [or] the brave Vikramāditya, Arakanese (Magha) say he has the knowledge of Buddha [Phorā].<sup>75</sup>
28. Muslims say that the righteous Anushirwan came back on earth.
29. The kings devotedly revere [him], the Lion *avatar* [of Viṣṇu] who always rides his elephant.
30. He prepares countless armies and fills up [the air] with the sound of instruments; his boats enchant the world.
31. When he goes on hunt, he deploys his banners to the sound of the kettle-drums like a roaring black cloud.
32. [He deploys] Thousands of elephants that look like ranges of clouds; his army hides the sun like an umbrella.
33. Ranges of horses parade in various ways; there [process] a multitude of columns of troops.
34. Above, Indra is shameful, beneath, the king of serpents is shaking; the ways of the air are all obstructed.<sup>76</sup>
35. The dust of the feet of his army deprives the sun of its light, and dries up the rain up [in the sky].
36. Rivers are dried up, fishes lay on dry lands and the firmness of the king turns mountains into dust.
37. He is the jewel of the crown of all kings; proud like the master of the Kurus, in generosity he always behaves like Bali and Karṇa.<sup>77</sup>

38. In the west, [spreads] the wide ocean whose limits are unknown. There is no brave man like him in the world.
39. In the South, the ocean is its frontier, in the North the mounts of the Himalaya. In between, the peoples of the mountains.
40. When they heard about the greatness of the king, [they] revered him respectfully in their heart and happily paid their tribute.
41. He rules since his childhood,<sup>78</sup> and he is the benefactor of his allies and the destroyer of his enemies; he is extremely devoted to the divine Master.
42. He holds the sword of justice in his hand and wins over his foes; he is constantly engaged in pious vows.
43. When the columns of boats [are sailing], no way is found in the ocean, and they put the enemy's troops on flight;
44. Scared, they dive in the inferior worlds. A huge body like a mountain, the world bows [under their weight].
45. Boats of various types look like ranges of clouds and the golden banners are thunders.
46. Herein the kettle-drums roar, and thunders of cannonballs strike, the arrows and bullets [fall in] a dense rain.
47. The enemies are paralyzed when they hear the sound of the boats and think about a way [to escape].
48. At their sight, [enemies] become senseless and cannot make the right choice: flight or surrender?
49. Decorated with gold and jewels, they dance in brocades and on [the rhythm of] the sticks of kettle-drums.
50. Hundreds of thousands of boats fly and come by flocks, in a moment they cover the sun.
51. He has no equal on earth; he is Death for his enemies, and the master of the fourfold army on seas and ground.<sup>79</sup>
52. He is the only resplendent sun, he does not have an ounce of arrogance; with such a king the earth is blessed.
53. He reveres God in a deeply devoted way, and at his door kings work [at his bidding].<sup>80</sup>
54. When the king sat on the throne, he put an end to arrogance and placed everything in truthfulness.
55. The Earth said: 'I am blessed with such a master gained thanks to an extremely good fortune.'
56. Humankind crossed progressively the Satya, Tretā and Dvāpara ages, and the Satya came again as a result of the Kali age.<sup>81</sup>
57. The noble king Candrasudharma is the son of Nrpatigiri's son Candāumātārā.<sup>82</sup>
58. There is no limit to his beauty and qualities and a man with a limited intelligence like me is unable to describe his glory and renown.

59. May he live until one hundred and twenty years! May his accomplishments fill the world as long as the waters flow and the winds blow.
60. His glory like jasmine and sandal subdues the ten directions. May devotion to God dwell in his heart.
61. May the world be fearless, the fraud deprived of country and the body of disease!
62. May he never be separated from his kinsmen! May the kingdom remain in happiness! May he be as wise as Bṛhaspati!<sup>183</sup>

We argued, in this essay, for a reassessment of Arakan's place in the world of the northern Bay and urged for a new interpretation of Arakan's history, not in terms of its links with Bengal and neither in terms of its position in the politics of mainland Burma. We debated that Arakan's peculiar history can be understood better if its place within the Bay of Bengal system in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was considered.

Characteristically, Arakan's geographical location—a narrow coastal strip adjoining the south-eastern Bengal delta and cut off from Burma proper has led to historians studying Arakan almost as an appendage of south-eastern Bengal. The inordinate focus on the 'Magh raids' emanating from Arakan has produced scholarly interpretations on Arakanese history in terms of either aggression or subservience. Conventionally, studies have concentrated on two elements, both affirming the historiographic bias towards Bengal: 'piracy' towards Bengal or 'cultural borrowings' from Bengal.

We urge for a fresh look at Arakan's history in terms of studying the dynamism evident in its politics, in its trade (in which 'piracy' was just another 'unofficial' element) and in its literary and cultural production, and contend that instead of regarding the Arakanese kingdom as plunderer or pirate state, one should see Arakan as an early modern state that used institutionalized aggression to extend its territory and participated in commerce in the Bay to build up a revenue-rich base; a base that, in its turn, engendered a unique cultural production.

#### NOTES

1. Bisvesuar Bhattacharya, 'Bengali Influence in Arakan', *Bengal Past and Present*, vol. 33, 1927, pp. 139–44; Jamini Mohan Ghosh, *Magh Raiders in Bengal*, Calcutta, Patna, Allahabad, 1960; Alamgir M. Serajuddin, 'Muslim Influence in Arakan and the Muslim names of the Arakanese Kings: a Reassessment', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1986, pp. 17–23; Abdul B.M. Habibullah, 'Arakan in the Pre-Mughal History of Bengal', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 11, 1945, pp. 33–8; Suniti Bhushan Qanungo, *History of Chittagong to 1761*, Chittagong: Signet Library, 1988.

2. Maurice C. Collis, 'Arakan's Place in the Civilization of the Bay (A Study of Coinage and Foreign Relations)', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, vol. 15, 1925, pp. 34–52; Maurice C. Collis, *The Land of the Great Image, being experiences of Friar Manrique in Arakan*, London: Faber and Faber, 1943; Maurice C. Collis, 'The City of Golden Mrauk-U', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, vol. 13, 1923, pp. 244–56; Maurice C. Collis, 'The Strange Murder of King Thirithudhamma', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, vol. 13, 1923, pp. 236–43; Maurice C. Collis, 'D. Martim 1606–1643, the first Burman to visit Europe', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1925, pp. 11–23.
3. The major exception was Arthur P. Phayre (a former commissioner of the British province of Arakan) who, at the opposite end of the writers who approached the country's history from a purely South Asian perspective, focused on Arakan's place in Burmese history and largely disregarded how much Arakanese history was connected to Bengali history. A.P. Phayre, 'Account of Arakan', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 2, 1841, pp. 679–712; A.P. Phayre, 'On the History of Arakan', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 1, 1844, pp. 23–52; A.P. Phayre, 'The Coins of Arakan: The Historical Coins', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 15, 1846, pp. 232–7; A.P. Phayre, 'Coins of Arakan, of Pegu and of Burma', *Numismata Orientalia*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1882, pp. 1–47; A.P. Phayre, *History of Burma*, London: Trubner, 1883.
4. D.G.E. Hall, 'Studies in Dutch Relations with Arakan in the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, vol. 26, 1936, pp. 1–31; D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South East Asia*, London: Macmillan, 1955; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire: Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal 1500–1700*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990; Ana Marques Guedes, *Interferência et Integração dos Portugueses na Birmânia c. 1580–1630*, Lisboa: Fundao Oriente, 1994.
5. Looking at the connections between Sri Lanka and Arakan, Catherine Raymond wrote 'Religious and Scholarly Exchanges between the Singhalese Sangha and the Arakanese and Burmese Theravadin Communities: Historical Documentation and Physical Evidence', in *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal 1500–1800*, ed. Denis Lombard and Om Prakash, Delhi: Manohar/ Indian Council of Historical Research, 1999, pp. 87–114. Leider's 'Forging Buddhist Credentials as a Tool of Legitimacy and Ethnic Identity: A Study of Arakan's Subjection in Nineteenth Century Burma', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2008, pp. 409–59, also contains information on the pre-colonial relations with Sri Lanka.
6. The October 1998 KITLV/University of Leiden conference entitled 'Coastal Burma in the Age of Commerce' (Amsterdam) provided for the first time an overview of the state of studies focusing on ancient and early modern Arakan (papers published in Jos Gommans/ Jacques Leider, ed., *The Maritime Frontier of Burma: Exploring Political, Cultural and Commercial Interaction in the Indian Ocean World, 1200–1800*, Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen; Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002. The conference

was seen by some participants as a follow-up to the 1995 Calcutta conference focusing on Bay of Bengal studies (papers published in Denis Lombard/Om Prakash, ed., *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal 1500–1800*. ‘The Forgotten Kingdom of Arakan’ conference organized by the Institute of Asian Studies of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok (23–4 November 2005) was entirely devoted to Arakanese historical studies (conference volume edited by Pamela Gutman, forthcoming).

7. An extensive analysis of Arakan’s political history is found in Leider’s *Le Royaume d’Arakan, Birmanie: Son histoire politique entre le début du XVe et la fin du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris: Publications de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2004. For an overview of Arakan’s early modern history, see Leider’s ‘Arakan’s Ascent during the Mrauk U Period’, in *Recalling Local Pasts, Autonomous History in Southeast Asia*, ed. Sunait Chutintaranond and Chris Baker, Chieng Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002, pp. 53–87. An alternative interpretation of Arakan’s rise is found in Michael W. Charney, ‘Rise of a Mainland Trading State: Rakhaing under the Early Mrauk Kings c. 1430–1603’, *Journal of Burma Studies*, vol. 3, 1997. Leider gives a detailed account of Arakan’s territorial expansion in ‘On Arakanese Territorial Expansion: Origins, Context, Means and Practice’, in Gommans/Leider, *The Maritime Frontier*, pp. 127–50.
8. In his *History of Chittagong*, Chittagong, 1986, pp. 292–3, Suniti B. Qanungo writes: ‘It is really amusing to note that the Bengali literature was being cultivated extensively in a foreign country under the patronage of alien rulers. But the most interesting of all is that being in deadly hostility with the Mughals in their foreign relations, the Arakanese monarchs at home granted the greatest privileges to the Muslims, extended patronage to the Islamic culture and gave influential support to the Muslim poets in their literary pursuits’.
9. See Tilman Frasch’s contribution in Gommans/Leider, *The Maritime Frontier*.
10. All later written sources agree on the date of AD 1430 for the foundation of the city of Mrauk U on a site that had already been settled previously.
11. The best known of these kings with ‘Muslim’ titles is Ali Khan (1433–59). Leider has discussed this impact in his ‘These Buddhist Kings with Muslim Names . . .’ in *Etudes birmanes en hommage à Denise Bernot*, Paris: EFEO, 1998, pp. 189–215.
12. We discard in this essay any discussion of the question if the Arakanese had actually conquered Chittagong in the middle of the fifteenth or in the early sixteenth century, as the Arakanese chronicling tradition claims.
13. Ashin Candamalalankara, *Rakhaing Mahayazawin thit* (*The New Chronicle of Rakhaing*), 2 vols., Mandalay: Hamsawati-pitakat, 1931, vol. 1, pp. 357; 370–81; vol. 2, pp. 3–85 (*passim*). Little is known in detail of their history and their migrations from north-east Burma through northern Arakan to the hilly region south-east of Chittagong. At the end of the fifteenth century and in the early sixteenth century, their attacks posed a constant threat to Mrauk U. The Arakanese sources call ‘Chak’ (pronounced ‘Thet’) referring to a group of people and their king whom we can historically identify with the contemporary Chakma (or Sangma) of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In all

- likelihood, the Arakanese designation also includes the tiny ethnic group known as Cak, as Heinz Bechert, et al., stated against Lucien Bernot, *Les Cak (Contribution à l'étude ethnographique d'une population de langue loi)*, Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1967.
14. While the pre-1538 chronicles, the *Decadas da Asia*, are silent on any Portuguese contacts with Arakan, it does not look as if the archives of the Torre do Tombo either contain much information on the Portuguese presence before the late 1580s.
  15. Regarding the Portuguese and the Luso-Asian communities in the eastern Indian Ocean, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia 1500–1700—A Political and Economic History*, London/New York: Longman, 1993; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Quisling or cross-cultural broker?: Notes on the Life and Worlds of Dom Martinho de Alemão, Prince of Arakan’, *Mare Liberum*, vol. 5, 1993; Guedes *Interferência*; Jacques P. Leider, ‘The Portuguese Communities along the Myanmar Coast’ *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2002, pp. 53–88.
  16. We have used the term ‘gradual conquest’ to characterize the Arakanese struggle for the control of Chittagong and referred to 1578 as approximately the earliest possible date for taking control of the port. Man Phalaung gave his son Man Co Lha the title *anauk-bhuran*, ‘king of the West’, in 1581. Stephen van Galen is right to point out that Ch. Fernberger’s account of the battle for Chittagong in 1589 illustrates the precarious nature of the early Arakanese rule in Chittagong (Stephan van Galen, ‘Arakan and Bengal The Rise and Decline of the Mrauk U kingdom (Burma) from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century AD’, Ph.D. dissertation, Leiden, 2008, p. 52).
  17. Regarding the confusion in Mughal sources on these first direct encounters of the Arakanese fleets and Mughal forces, see Stephan van Galen, ‘Arakan and Bengal etc.’ 2008, p. 77, n. 78. In the short term, effective Mughal counter-initiatives failed in the midst of the embroiled succession at the head of Bengal’s governorship after the death of Akbar.
  18. Subrahmanyam duly recognizes the specificity of these communities when he talks of a ‘sub-culture within Portuguese Asia’, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Portuguese Empire*, p. 62.
  19. The 1620 Luso-Arakanese peace treaty was the result of this policy; Leider, *Le royaume d’Arakan*, p. 226. But VOC sources report that in 1623 the Arakanese once more faced Portuguese ships from Goa and Cochin that tried to blockade the Arakanese coast; Stephan van Galen, ‘Arakan and Bengal etc.’, p. 117.
  20. Mughal attempts to strike at Chittagong became possible only after Islam Khan’s successful wars from 1609 to 1613 against Musa Khan’s local coalition of *Bharo Bhuiyas* (such as Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore, Ramchandra of Bakla and Anantamanikya of Bhalwa). See Jacques P. Leider, *Le royaume d’Arakan*, pp. 207–8, and Stephan van Galen ‘Arakan and Bengal etc.’, pp. 93–9.
  21. Stephan van Galen ‘Arakan and Bengal etc.’, pp. 116–20.
  22. Stephan van Galen, ‘Arakan and Bengal etc.’, pp. 124–5, based on Talish and Dutch VOC sources.

23. Sebastien Manrique, *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique 1629–1643 (vol. 1: Arakan)*, Oxford: Hakluyt Society, 1927.
24. Syed Hasan Askari, ‘The Mughal-Magh Relations down to the time of Islam Khan Mashadi’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 23rd Session, Gauhati 1959*, 1960, pp. 201–13.
25. In 1644, the deportation and the resettlement of thousands of Chittagonian craftsmen in the Kaladan valley led to a humanitarian disaster as food provisions for the newly arrived groups were insufficient. It also led to a revolt in Chittagong; see Stephan van Galen, ‘Arakan and Bengal etc.’, pp. 159–60.
26. Stephan van Galen, ‘Arakan and Bengal etc.’, p. 166.
27. Abdul Habibullah writes ‘Shaista Khan’s final occupation of Chittagong in 1666 . . . was, as is well known, the result more of his diplomacy by which he won over the Portuguese, than of his military might’ in his article ‘Arakan in the Pre-Mughal history of Bengal’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 11, 1945, p. 38.
28. Jacques P. Leider, *Le royaume d’Arakan*, p. 431; Stephan van Galen, ‘Arakan and Bengal etc.’, p. 209, fn. 16 and 17, referring also to S. Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India*.
29. To cut short on footnotes, the reader is invited for more extensive overviews of Arakan’s maritime and inland trade to Jacques P. Leider, *Le royaume d’Arakan*, pp. 417–44 and Stephan van Galen, ‘Arakan and Bengal etc.’, pp. 204–44.
30. Talish quoted in Jadunath Sarkar, *Studies in Aurangzib’s Reign*, Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar, 1933, pp. 183–4.
31. This point is made clear by Shihabuddin Talish, whose testimonial can serve to illustrate the situation extending from 1625 to 1665. He writes: ‘[Latterly] the rajah [king of Arakan] appointed the Feringi pirates [Portuguese] to plunder Bengal, and hence he did not send the Arracan fleet for the purpose. . . . As the Harmads [=Feringi pirates] were not in need of the help of the Arracan fleet, the king of Arracan did not send his ships to practise piracy in Mughal territory (Bengal)’ in Sarkar, *Studies*, pp. 180, 188–9.
32. According to the account of Talish, see Sarkar, *Studies*, p. 185, the sailors of the Bengal flotilla were in such a fright, that I may say without exaggeration that whenever hundred warships of Bengal sighted four ships of the enemy, if the distance separating them was great the Bengal crew showed fight by flight, considered it a great victory that they had carried off their lives in safety, and became famous in Bengal for their valour and heroism! If the interval was small and the enemy overpowered them, the men of the Bengal ships—rowers, sepoys, and armed men alike—threw themselves without delay into the water, preferring drowning to captivity.  
For a similar account, see François Bernier, *Voyages de François Bernier contenant la description des États du Grand Mogol, de l’Hindostan, du royaume de Kachemire etc.*, Paris, 1830, p. 244.
33. The failed land invasion of Ibrahim Khan in 1621 provides the evidence. Talish refers variously to this policy of systematic depopulation, see Sarkar, *Studies*, 1933, pp. 180, 182–3, 198: ‘From Jagdia [on the Feni River] where there was a

[Mughal] outpost, to Chatgaon lay a wilderness. On the skirt of the hill was a dense jungle, without any vestige of habitation or living being'; '... the Maghs who did not leave a bird in the air or a beast on the land [from Chatgaon] to Jagdia, the frontier of Bengal, increased the desolation, thickened the jungles, destroyed the *al* (=embankments), and closed the road as well that even the snake and the wind could not pass through.'; 'From Jagdia, the frontier of Mughal Bengal, to Chatgaon, a distance of 30 kos, is an utterly desolate wilderness.' A similar description may be found in Manrique, 1927, vol. 1, pp. 394–5, when he describes his return to Arakan in 1635. Discussing the island of Sogoldiva [Sagar ?], he writes that it was 'so highly estimated as to be known in Bengali as the richest of all', but now 'these fertile islands are [...] desolate owing to the incessant war between the Maghs, Mogors and Portuguese.' Cf. Gautier Schouten, *Voyage de Gautier Schouten aux Indes orientales 1658–1665*, Rouen, 1727, vol. 2, p. 154.

34. While making a clear distinction between the interests and the policies of the Arakanese kingdom and the particular role of the Luso-Asian communities, one cannot disregard the fact that seen from a bottom-up perspective 'piracy' always had a life of its own along the coasts of south-east Bengal. The current Wikipedia article on 'piracy', quoting the International Maritime Bureau's 2006 annual report, labels the port of Chittagong as a 'hotspot' of contemporary piracy! When discussing the political and economic circumstances in seventeenth Arakan, we reject nonetheless the term 'piracy' for the sake of accuracy. 'Piracy', being defined as 'robbery committed at sea without the consent of a nation' does not accurately describe the activities of the Portuguese/Luso-Asians. The term 'privateer' would be better suited as the Luso-Asians were legally operating with the sanction of the Arakanese king. Besides the legal aspect, one may also reflect on the socio-economic nature of piracy. Wouter Schouten's picturesque description of the arrival of a Luso-Arakanese fleet that wanted to sell its booty at Pipli in January 1663 elicits the reader's smile because it reveals on the one hand, that piracy was really a form of trade for those who failed to enter the market on a regular basis, and on the other hand, that the mere threat of physical violence could be a marketing strategy. Cf. Gautier Schouten, *Voyage*, pp. 63–73.
35. See Stephan van Galen, 'Arakan and Bengal etc.', p. 128. For Arakanese tax collection in Hijli, see *ibid.*, p. 183.
36. In 1935 Abdul Karim and Enamul Haq published a monograph in Bengali on the subject of Bengali literature at the court of Arakan. This pioneering book presented for the first time a corpus of texts that were then unedited and preserved in manuscripts that Abdul Karim collected from the Chittagong area. Enamul Haq and Adbul Karim, 'Ārākān Rājasabhāya Bāmlā Sāhitya (1600–1700)', in *Muhammad Enamul Hak Racanāvalī*, vol. 2, pp. 17–142. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993. For a study in English of the works of the main Bengali authors of Arakan, Daulat Kājī and Ālāol, see Satyendranath Ghoshal, 'Beginning of Secular Romance in Bengali Literature', *Vishva-Bharati Annals*, vol. 9, 1959.

37. Two almost identical descriptions that illustrate the cosmopolitan character of Mrauk U are found in the list of merchants coming from across the world into the market of the city given by Sébastien Manrique and Álāol. See Sébastien Manrique, *Travels of Fray Sébastien Manrique 1629–1643*, vol. 1, 1927, p. 208 and Álāol, *Padmāvatī*, p. 13. About the world as seen from Mrauk U in one of Álāol's works, see the map given in Paul Wormser and Thibaut d'Hubert, 'Représentations du monde dans le golfe du Bengale au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Álāol et Rānīrī', *Archipel*, vol. 76, p. 31.
38. See for instance Sébastien Manrique, *Travels of Fray Sébastien Manrique 1629–1643*, vol. 1, 1927, p. 36; Gautier Schouten quoted in Jacques P. Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 291–3 and Daulat Kājī, *Lora-Candrāṇī o Satī-Maynā*, pp. 7–9. See the translation of Candasudhammarājā's eulogy in the present article.
39. See Jacques Leider, *Le Royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 464–77.
40. Cf. Catherine Raymond, *Religious and Scholarly Exchanges*.
41. See Jacques Leider, 'Specialists for rituals, magic and devotion, the court Brahmins (*punna*) of the Konbaung kings (1752–1885)', *Journal of Burma Studies*, vol. 10, 2006.
42. See Syed Hasan Askari, 'The Mughal-Magh relations'; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Persianization and mercantilism in Bay of Bengal history 1400–1700'; Stephan van Galen, 'Arakan and Bengal etc.', p. 211.
43. See France Bhattacharya, 'A propos d'une représentation du Cāṇḍī Maṅgal', *Adyatan d'AUJOURD'HUI*, vol. 3, 1984, pp. 7–26, Selim Al-Deen, *Madhyayugera bāmlā nāṭya*, Dhaka, 1995 and, regarding contemporary performances, see Saymon Zakaria, *Praṇamahi Baṅgamātā*, vols. 1 and 2, Dhaka, 2006–7.
44. For a detailed study of one of these texts, see France Bhattacharya, 'Un texte du Bengale médiéval: Le yoga du kalandar', *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient*, nos. 90–1, 2003–4.
45. Nevertheless a later account from the eighteenth century associates the Saiyad Sultan with the Arakanese king who sent a present to the Sufi poet. Cf. Ahmad Sharif, *Bāṅgālī o bāmlā sāhitya*, vol. 2, Dhaka: Niu Eja, 2008, p. 379.
46. For conjectures about Daulat Kājī's life, see Abdul Karim and Enamul Haq, *Ārakān rājasabhāya bāmlā sāhitya (1600–1700)*, Calcutta, 1937, pp. 43–4.
47. Cf. Álāol, *Ālāol racanāvalī*, ed. Muhammad Abdul Qayyum and Razia Sultana, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2007, pp. 9–10, 148–50, 313–15, 456–8. Even though it is not a scientific edition of Álāol's poem, since it is now easily available and for the sake of convenience, we will refer to it in order to locate some passages of his texts. But the translation given at the end of this essay is based on a text established by d'Hubert.
48. Awadhi is a literary language of north India in which versified Sufi romances were composed under the patronage of Afghan rulers during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. See Mañjhana, *Madhumālatī: an Indian Sufi romance/ Mīr Sayyid Manjhān Shattārī Rājgīrī*, Introduction, translation and notes by Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman, with Shyam Manohar Pandey, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.

49. Daulat Kājī's patron was the *laskar wazīr*, literally the 'minister of the army'. Ālāol speaks of his patrons by using various titles, more or less identifiable, such as *rājapātra* ('royal dignitary'), *mukhyapātra* ('principal dignitary'), *pātra* ('dignitary'), *mukhyasandhamati* ('principal eunuch?'), *majlis* (tax collector and representative of the foreign traders). See note 51, for the references of the prologues in which these titles are encountered. The term *sandhamati* is erroneously transcribed *śūnyamati* or *sainyamantri* in the text of *Saptapaykara* of the complete works of Ālāol. See for instance Ālāol, *Ālāol racanāvalī*, pp. 200, 206.
50. See Ālāol, *Ālāol racanāvalī*, p. 314.
51. Daulat Kājī, *Lora-Candrāṇī o Satī-Maynā*, Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad, 2003, pp. 4–11 and Ālāol, *Ālāol racanāvalī*, pp. 6–9, 148, 199–200, 312–13, 412–13, 454–6.
52. See Abdul Karim and Enamul Haq, *Ārakān rājasabhbāya bāmlā sāhitya* (1600–1700). Satyendranath Ghoshal discusses the 'court poet of the Arakan kings', but adds that we are not sure that they actually knew Bengali. Satyendranath Ghoshal, *Beginning of secular romance*, p. 2.
53. See Ahmad Sharif *Bāngālī o bāmlā sāhitya*, p. 197.
54. See Daulat Kājī, *Lora-Candrāṇī o Satī-Maynā*, p. 10 and Ālāol, *Padmāvatī*, ed. Debnath Bandyopadhyay, 1985; rpt, Kolkata: Paścimabaṅga Rājya Pustaka Parṣat, 2002, p. 17, *Ālāol racanāvalī*, pp. 200, 315, 412, 457.
55. See Paul Wormser and Thibaut d'Hubert, 'Représentations du monde'.
56. The translations were commissioned during literary assemblies (*sabhā*) that were local versions of the Persian *majlis*. The *majlis* was actually more than a place where literature was performed and debated. As a place of cultural interaction it held crucial importance in the shaping of Persianate societies. In the case of Mrauk U, the *sabhā/majlis* was the occasion for Muslim dignitaries to display cultural refinement and to gather knowledge from cultivated individuals, traders or religious figures, who found a familiar environment in this type of gathering. Literary *majlis* certainly played a major role in the formation of trading and intellectual networks in the Bay of Bengal.
57. Cf. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Persianization and mercantilism' and Paul Wormser and Thibaut d'Hubert, 'Représentations du monde'.
58. Bengali was also a literary language in the courts of Nepal, Assam and Tripura. See Sukumar Sen, *Bāngālā sāhityera itihāsa*, vol. 1, 1975, pp. 214–24 and Horst Brinkhaus, 'On the Transition from Bengali to Maithili in the Nepalese Dramas of the 16th and 17th Centuries', in *Maithili studies, papers presented at the Stockholm conference on Maithili language and literature*, ed. W.L. Smith, Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 2003.
59. 'Mirror for princes' or *naṣīḥat al-mulūk* is a genre in Arabic and Persian literatures that consists of advice to rulers and their executives on politics and statecraft. Usually the authors of such texts draw on ancient narratives involving exemplary political figures of the pre-Islamic period. See C.E. Bosworth, 'Naṣīḥatal-Mulūk', *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs,

- Brill, 2011, Brill Online, University Of Chicago Libraries, accessed on 3 March 2011.
60. In South Asia a *ghat* is a path with stairs on the bank of a river that gives access to the water.
  61. Ālāol often used the term *rājanīti* that may be translated ‘political science’ to designate the king in his poems. Hence, the royal figure is first and foremost conceived of as the embodiment of a knowledge that makes possible the governance of the kingdom. See for instance Ālāol, *Ālāol racanāvalī*, pp. 162, 236 and translation of this passage in the present article (line 18).
  62. This treatise is entitled *Tohphā* (The Present) and is a translation of *Tuhfa-yi naṣā'ih* composed in Persian by Yūsuf Gadā (Delhi, fourteenth century). See *ibid.*, pp. 409–49.
  63. Regarding this poem and its orthodox character as compared to its Persian model, see Peter Gaeffke, ‘Alexander and the Bengali Sufis’, New Delhi/Paris, 1994.
  64. Qanungo’s astonishment regarding the support provided by the Buddhist king to his Muslim courtiers is due to a simplistic approach to religious identities. The general attitude at the court seems to have been largely pragmatic, and religious beliefs came second to economic and political interests. This pragmatic attitude also appears in the absence of open references to the Mughal power. Ālāol does not seem to take an ideological stand for the regional Arakanese power against the imperialist Mughals. Regarding the Shah Shuja’ incident, he relates these events in a very factual way. He mainly complains about the bad advices given to the Mughal prince by his followers and he praises the king for getting himself out of prison and for punishing his detractor, a person called Mirzā. We would argue that such a tempered position testifies to the will of the Bengali Muslims to preserve their status in the Arakanese court milieu. For different approaches to the subject of political ideology in Ālāol’s works, see Swapna Bhattacharya, ‘Myth and history of Bengali identity’, in *The Maritime Frontier of Burma: Exploring Political, Cultural and Commercial Interaction in the Indian Ocean World, 1200–1800*, ed. J. Gommans and J. Leider, Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen; Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002. and Ramya Sreenivasan, *The many lives of a Rajput queen*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007.
  65. Satyendranath Ghoshal already pointed to the historical value of this passage. Cf. Satyendranath Ghoshal, *Beginning of Secular Romance*, pp. 197–201 and ‘Missing links’, pp. 260–4.
  66. Rosāṅga is the Bengali name of Mrauk U and it is also used to designate the kingdom of Arakan.
  67. This translation has been done from the text of a manuscript kept at the Bangla Academy of Dhaka (no.185 AS Mu., fols. 3a-4b). We occasionally kept some variant readings of a manuscript in Arabic script copied in Akyab in 1226 of the Arakanese era kept at the Dhaka University (no. 415, pp. 4–9), as well as the printed edition of 1301 BA/1893 (Śrījuta Chaiyada Ālāol, *Chahi Chayaphula mulluka o Badiujjāmāla*, ed. Śrī Hāmidullā, Kolkata: Bharakati Preśa, pp. 3–6)

and of the text of the complete works of Ālāol recently published at the Bangla Academy (Ālāol, *Ālāol racanāvalī*, pp. 454–6). In the opening line the fertility of the land certainly refers to Dhaññavatī (the land rich with grains) the name given to the area around Mrauk U.

68. Candrasudharma is the Sanskritized form of the Pali name Candasudhamma. The proper Pali name of the king is Candasudhammarājā, and the last member of this compound is *sudhammarājā* ‘the good *dhammarājā*’. Ālāol’s Sanskritized form Candrasudharma-narapati does not exactly convey the Buddhist notion of *dhammarājā*.
69. This is a reference to a famous story relating how Kāma, the god of love and desire, attempted to disrupt Shiva’s meditation in order to make him fall in love with the daughter of the mount Himalaya, Parvati. Kāma failed and Shiva burned him through the power of his third eye. Since then Kāma is bodiless and hence called ‘Ananga’ (The-bodiless one).
70. Anushirwan is the name of a Sasanian king who ruled between 531 and 579. In the Persian mirror for princes genre he is the model par excellence of the pre-Islamic just king.
71. This Salomonic image is also found in Ālāol’s *Sapta paykara* about the reign of Bahrām Gūr. In the latter case it is inspired by the Persian poet Nizami’s verses. See Ālāol, *Ālāol racanāvalī*, p. 223.
72. The return of the subjects who fled the tyrannical rule of previous kings is a common motif found elsewhere in Ālāol’s poems. It may not refer to any precise historical event. See *ibid.*, p. 224.
73. Since Ālāol used very few Persian words in his texts, it is worth noting that he uses the Persian *rāy-bār* to designate messengers coming from abroad.
74. Indra’s paradise is the celestial counterpart of earthly royal courts in ancient South and South-East Asia. The Gandharvas who surround Indra in line 20 are celestial musicians.
75. Yudhiṣṭhīra is the elder brother of the Pāṇḍavas in the *Mahābhārata*. Vikramāditya is a semi-legendary king who is a symbol of literary patronage because he gathered around him ‘nine gems’, that is to say nine poets and scholars. Phorā is the Bengali rendering of the Arakanese Phrā which is basically an honorific particle used as the Sanskrit *śri*. In the present case Phorā designates the Buddha.
76. The ‘king of serpents’ is Vāsuki who reigns in the nether worlds.
77. The master of the Kurus is Duryodhana in the *Mahābhārata*. Bali and Karṇa are two mythological figures who performed generous acts. Bali is demon who promised Vāmana, Viṣṇu’s avatar as a dwarf, to give him as much land as he could cover in three steps. But unfortunately for Bali the three steps covered the three worlds (paradise, earth and the inferior worlds). Karṇa is a character of the *Mahābhārata* who offered the armour he was born with to Indra disguised as a brahman.
78. Candasudhammarājā reigned since he was fourteen years old. See the genealogy of the Arakanese kings in Leider, *Le Royaume d’Arakan*, p. 494.
79. The fourfold army (*caturaṅga*) embraces the elephants, chariots, infantry and cavalry.

80. ‘Work [at his bidding]’ translates *khāne* (lit. ‘To strive’). In Sen’s etymological dictionary, for the verb ‘*khāta*’—he quotes Narasiṁha’s *Dharmamaṅgala*: *biśāśay nrpati yāhār ājñā khāte* ‘So many kings work at his bidding’. We assume that in the present case *khāta*—intends *ājñā khāta-*. See Sen, *An etymological dictionary of Bengali: c.1000–1800 A.D.*, Calcutta: Eastern Publishers, 1971.
81. The Satya, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali are the four ages (*yuga*) of the world in Hindu cosmology. The Satya is the Golden age and the Kali the age of decadence. The poet suggests here that the perfection of the reign of the Arakanese king made the world enter into a new Golden age.
82. The names of these kings as found in Arakanese sources are Narapati krī: (1638–45), Satu:dhammarājā (1645–52) and Candasudhammarājā (1652–84). Cf. Jacques P. Leider, *Le Royaume d’Arakan*.
83. Br̥haspati is the preceptor of the gods in Hindu mythology.

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